

Private Lands

1994

The Refuge received four requests for wetland restoration assistance and three requests for prairie restoration/reconstruction assistance in 1994. Due to physical or economic factors, three of the wetland restoration projects were not feasible.

WNT was able to assist the Polk County Conservation Board and Ducks Unlimited with restoration of a 23.7 acre wetland complex. Tile lines were plugged or removed and dikes were constructed to back up shallow water. A total of six wetland basins were restored.

Of the three requests for prairie restoration assistance, the Refuge was able to complete two projects totaling 21 acres. Both projects involved cooperative agreements where WNT provided local ecotype grass and forb seed. As part of the agreement, the Refuge will secure seed harvest rights for 10-15 years. Completion of the third project is expected in 1995 and will have a similar cooperative agreement.

WNT also assisted Polk County SCS personnel with a minimal effect site inspection on land owned by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. Pioneer proposed to install an elaborate tile system to achieve equal drainage throughout a field for crop research plots. Seven farmed wetlands totaling 3.5 acres would be affected. State Private Lands Assistant Coordinator Nancy Derey and ROS Olawsky toured the site in June and recommended that a minimal effects exemption be denied. Subsequent meetings resulted in a Wetland Mitigation Agreement which would restore 4.0 acres of prior converted cropland to wetland. As part of the agreement, the restored Wetland Easement Area will be surrounded by a 100 foot wide grassed buffer strip with haying restricted. Wetland restoration should begin early in 1995. The restored wetland is located in a high visibility area and will provide an excellent showcase for wetland restoration.

The 1994 Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) attracted a great deal of interest. The 1994 WRP was expanded to 20 states from the eight states involved in the 1992 pilot program. This program was developed to assist landowners who wished to restore and protect wetlands through the purchase of perpetual easements. To be eligible for the WRP, land had to meet the following criteria:

The land had been considered planted at least one year between 1986 and 1990

The land had physically been able to be planted in 1992 or 1993

The site was at least 2 acres and no larger than 1000 acres

At least 75% of the land was designated as farmed wetland, prior converted cropland, or a wetland farmed under natural conditions

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The land had to be restorable wetland

Inspections of WRP intention sites were conducted by Olawsky, with assistance from SCS personnel in the following counties: Adair (2), Boone (2), Greene (6), Madison (7), Marion (7), Dallas (8), Polk (8), Warren (9), Marshall (12), Story (12), Guthrie (13), and Jasper (19). Of the 105 sites examined, rankings and preliminary wetland restoration plans were developed for 67 sites. Two sites in Jasper and Polk Counties were ultimately accepted into the WRP program.

Emergency Wetland Reserve Program (EWRP) site visits, as well as work on Preliminary Wetland Restoration Plans and use of a diverse mix of Iowa ecotype grasses and forbs was encouraged for upland seeding, Olawsky assisted SCS personnel in developing planting prescriptions for upland portions of both WRP and EWRP. Requirements for eligibility in EWRP were similar to those in 1993:

the land had to have been flooded during 1993

the land had to have been cropped one of the last five years

the cost of the easement was less than the cost to restore the land back to crop production

the land had to be restorable to wetland

at least 75% of the land was designated as farmed wetland, prior converted cropland, potential wetland or a wetland farmed under natural conditions

In 1994, SCS broadened EWRP selection criteria to include societal cost. Societal costs included what the government would save in terms of disaster payments, etc. if areas were not restored to cropland and dikes were not repaired. Many sites which had previously been disqualified due to lack of cropland damage were re-submitted and accepted. Site inspections were conducted by Olawsky and SCS personnel in Marshall (1), Guthrie (1), Story (3), Dallas (5), and Polk (6), Counties. Preliminary and Final Wetland Restorations Plans were developed for all 16 EWRP sites, although one landowner later withdrew from consideration.

1995

The Refuge received 11 requests for wetland restoration assistance and 14 requests for prairie restoration/reconstruction assistance in 1995. Seven of the wetland restoration projects were not feasible at this time. Due to WNT funding shortages, Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge agreed to provide funding for two wetland restoration projects in Guthrie and Boone Counties.

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WNT was able to assist the Polk County Conservation Board with two wetland restoration projects totaling 10 acres within the Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Project. Silt deposits resulting from soil erosion were removed. Water control structures were installed to restore hydrology to several miles of oxbows isolated by prior channelization.

Of the 14 requests for prairie restoration assistance, the Refuge was able to complete 4, totaling 94 acres in 1995. Three projects involved cooperative agreements where WNT provided local ecotype grass and forb seed or funding for prairie reconstruction on land owned by county conservation boards. The fourth project involved prairie reconstruction on private land. As part of the agreements, the Refuge will secure seed harvest rights for 10-15 years for future private lands projects. Completion of three additional projects on private land are expected in 1996 and will have similar cooperative agreements.

Wetland restoration activities were completed in 1995 for a 4.0 acre site resulting from a 1994 Wetland Mitigation Agreement with Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. The restored wetlands located in a high visibility area of Polk County and will provide an excellent local showcase for wetland restoration.

Several training sessions were attended by ROS Heisler and Olawsky during the year. In March, Olawsky attended the Private Lands Coordinators Annual Meeting and NRCS National Food Security Act Manual training. In May, Heisler and Olawsky attended 1995 Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) training. In the fall, Heisler attended Wetland Plant Identification training and Interagency Wetland Identification and Delineation training.

The 1995 Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) attracted less interest in the WNT local coordination area than in the previous year. In 1995, WRP was offered nationwide, while in 1994, the program had been offered in only 20 states. To be eligible for WRP, land had to meet the following criteria:

- the land had been considered planted at least one year between 1986 and 1990

- the land had physically been able to be planted in 1992 or 1993,

- the site was at least two acres and no larger than 1,000 acres,

- at least 50% of the land was designated as farmed wetland, farmed wetland pasture, prior converted cropland, or a wetland farmed under natural conditions,

- the land had to be restorable to wetland

Unlike 1994, which used both state and national ranking criteria, acceptance of eligible sites into the 1995 WRP was determined by state ranking criteria only.

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1995 WRP intentions by county included: Boone (1), Greene (12), Dallas (3), Polk (6), Warren (4), Marshall (5), Story (4), Guthrie (4), and Jasper (1). Of the 40 sites examined, rankings and Preliminary Wetland Restoration Plans were developed for 23 sites.

Emergency Wetland Reserve Program (EWRP) sites visits, as well as work on Preliminary Wetland Restoration Plans and Final Wetland Restoration Plans, continued into 1995. Heisler and Olawsky assisted NRCS personnel in developing planting prescriptions for upland portions of both WRP and EWRP sites. To be eligible for EWRP, sites had to meet the following criteria:

the land had to have been flooded during 1993,

at least 50% of the land had a cropping history

the cost of the easement was less than the cost to restore the land back to crop production

The land had to be restorable to wetland.

1995 EWRP site visits were conducted by Heisler and Olawsky along with NRCS personnel in Marshall County (1), Guthrie County (2), Boone County (1), Dallas County (2), Warren County (2), and Polk County (6). Preliminary Wetland Restoration Plans were developed for all 14 EWRP sites. In addition, work continued on Final Wetland Restoration Plans and revisions for 5 EWRP sites which carried over from 1994.

ROS Heisler and Olawsky assisted NRCS with two wetland determination appeals and two minimal effect requests within the WNT local coordination area.

1996/7

The Refuge received three requests for wetland restoration assistance in 1996. Due to physical or economic factors, none of the wetland restoration projects were feasible at this time.

Technical assistance was provided by the Service's Iowa Private Lands Office for two of the projects (both in Polk County).

Of eight new requests for prairie restoration assistance, the Refuge was able to provide technical assistance for four projects in 1996. WNT was able to complete three prairie reconstruction projects totaling 11 acres. All three projects involved agreements where WNT provided Iowa ecotype grass and forb seed. As part of the agreements, WNT will secure seed harvest rights for 10-15 years for future private lands projects.

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1998

Approximately 80 landowners were visited in the field and provided technical assistance. These landowners provided roughly 10,500 acres for review within our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Approximately 3,000 dollars were spent for habitat restoration.

Threats and Conflicts – The largest threat to the Refuge related to watershed concerns is the increasing number of large hog confinement operations being built. There was at least on such operation planned within the watershed but it met with so much opposition that the prospective building/owner opted to not proceed with the construction. These operations have become very common within the state and many have caused major damage to waterways from spillage of manure. The recent plummeting hog prices has eased this concern for the time being.

1999

Staff provided technical assistance to other agencies and private landowners on wetland restoration. Numerous acres were protected by the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Refuge staff provided much assistance within this program.

Staff provided technical assistance to numerous individuals and other agencies on upland restoration. Approximately 3,000 acres were restored to tallgrass prairie habitat.

Approximately 30 individual landowners were visited in the field and were provided technical assistance on programs such as WRP, FmHA, and Partners for Fish and Wildlife. These private land activities affected approximately 3,000 acres. Over \$40,000 were contributed by many different partners to projects within our Partners for Fish & Wildlife program.

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2000

Approximately 30 individual landowners were contacted by FWS personnel and provided technical assistance for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The private land activities affected in some way, approximately 800 acres. Total projects involved had approximately \$10,000 contributed by the FWS for dirt work and seed purchase. In addition, the partners involved matched those dollars with donated time, money, equipment, goods and services.

2001

ROS Heisler worked closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Farm Services Agency (FSA), various Pheasants Forever chapters, county conservation boards, and private landowners to improve the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

Through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program approximately 30 site visits were conducted. Agreements were established for five of these. The remaining landowners were given technical assistance. This assistance effort affected approximately 620 acres. The agreements protected 43 acres consisting of 3 wetland acres and 40 upland acres. The restoration cost to the FWS was approximately \$5,000 for dirt work and seed purchase. In addition, partners donated time, money, equipment, goods and services.

Neal Smith NWR is responsible for 21 Farm and Home Administration easements scattered throughout 11 counties in the south/central part of Iowa. Although these easements have been under the charge of the Refuge for about 8 years, this was the first year staff had begun inspecting the easements. Surprisingly, those surveyed did not yield any glaring violations.

2002

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Through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program approximately 20 site visits were conducted. Agreements were established for two of these. The remaining landowners were given technical assistance, affecting approximately 600 acres. The two agreements protected 125 acres consisting of wetland and upland habitats. The restoration cost to the FWS was approximately \$5,000 for dirt work and seed purchase. In addition, partners donated time, money, equipment, goods and services.

Neal Smith NWR is responsible for 21 Farm and Home Administration easements scattered throughout 11 counties in south-central Iowa. Although these easements have been under the charge of the Refuge for about 8 years, 2001 was the first year staff began inspecting the easements. Heisler again visited all the easements throughout 2002. There were no major violations; one landowner with a small infraction was instructed on making the necessary corrections to be in compliance.

This year's Partners program was slow going with the departure of Jack Heisler but some valuable project were completed. The loss of Mr. Heisler made finding new contacts a real challenge. Through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, approximately 5 site visits were conducted before ROS Heisler's departure. Technical assistance was given on all sites improving approximately 60 acres. Agreements were established for three of these protecting 57 acres. All sites were tallgrass prairie restoration using five grasses and 20 species of forbs. The restorations sites are areas of high wildlife value and will provide much needed habitat.

2004

Most of this year's off-refuge restorations were enhancements, not restorations. Rich worked with two landowners who had over 70 acres of remnants on their property. This allowed for several new techniques to be used. The use of tree removal is one that Rich has not used in the past as well as the use of contractors for invasive species removal. The areas (30 ac) around a Madison County remnant were planted to natives harvested off the adjacent prairie. Some local ecotype forbs were added to the mix and a chemical burn was employed by the landowner. All landowners were given a management plan and provided the necessary knowledge to restore a prairie.

This year's Partners program was very active. Fourteen agreements were signed and over 270 acres of prairie were restored. Two wetlands, totaling approximately 17 acres, were restored. The bulk of this year's private lands' activities was spent helping landowners with technical assistance. Approximately 57 landowners called or had appointments to have their property

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reviewed. Though most were unable to enter into an agreement, all were very satisfied with the biological advice and were happy with the visit.

This year was the first for Rich and Below to inspect the FMHA easements. For the most part, the easements were intact. There were some problems and many were in dire need of management, but the majority was functioning as the easement intended. Mainly signs and seed were needed to improve these areas. One landowner was warned to remove equipment stored on the property and he was polite and advised us that it would be taken care of.

2005

Rich delivered approximately 60 pounds of prairie seed to landowners for the restoration of approximately 80 acres of prairie. Rich provided technical advice to 3 landowners owning over 2000 acres but since property was already in a federal program no financial assistance could be given.

Rich worked with 5 landowners this month. One already had an agreement and was looking for advice on seeding and spraying rates for their recently restored prairie. Other had wetland or pond concerns and technical advice was given. The others were involved in federal program already and were given technical advice but no agreements were signed.

Rich delivered 32 pounds of prairie mix to a landowner in Marion County for a reseeding of a failed restoration. This will be a winter seeding that will be packed and allowed to stratify over the winter and spring.

January 2005

Private Lands was pretty slow this month with the weather becoming more typical for January in the Midwest. One landowner was interviewed and technical assistance was given.

February 2005

Rich worked with 6 landowners and CCB's. No agreements have been signed but several are in the planning stages. A savanna reclamation and brush removal along a high quality remnant highlights the projects.

March 2005

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Rich visited 5 sites this month. All were high quality wildlife habitat and would have been excellent Partner's projects. Three of the properties were signed into the program with almost 400 acres being restored or impacted. The timing of work for the wetland complex in Marion County was wrong with Rich transferring this month but technical advice and soil probes were done. The other projects are all upland restorations; one with the Polk CCB and Polk county schools developing an educational prairie and the other with Story CCB on a tile break and pothole restoration.

May 2005

Since Rich's exit to Region 6 Private Lands Kansas Coordinator position, little has happened in the way of Private Lands activities. Jim Munson, Iowa Coordinator, has agreed to handle any requests that come through the refuge until the Refuge Operations Specialist position has been filled.

August 2005

Dykstra worked with IPL coordinator Munson to obligate remaining Private Lands funds.

2008

October 2008

Gilbertson and Doug Helmers, Iowa Private Lands, met with Loren Lown, Polk County Conservation at Chichaqua Bottoms to look at an FmHA easement on land that was recently purchased by Polk County. There is a possibility of doing some wetland restoration as well as prescribed burning.

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